

Maternal Legacy in *Frankenstein*

Dianne Hunter

Trinity College

“We think back through our mothers if we are women.”
--Virginia Woolf ([1928] 1929: 79)

"He died raving about some phantom."
--Captain Walton, *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* (1994)

In December of 1987, Saul Kent's mother Dora, was eighty-three years old and in failing health. When she seemed close to death, Saul Kent, a member of the board of the Alcor Life Extension Foundation in California, moved her to the premises of Alcor laboratory to freeze and preserve her remains. Mrs. Kent, formerly a seamstress, lived a day and a half longer, and when she died, without a doctor present, a lab worker immediately hooked her up to a heart-and-lung machine that kept her blood circulating. She was injected with the barbiturate Nembutal to keep her from reviving. Then she was preserved “as a neurosuspension—that is, simply a head.”

The doctor who signed her death certificate four days later said she had died of pneumonia. The coroner said maybe the Nembutal had killed her and asked the lab for Dora Kent's head. Mr. Kent said he had given it to a friend, who had hidden it in his house. The District Attorney threatened to prosecute for murder, but a judge declined to have Mrs. Kent's head thawed for autopsy. The case ended without legal charges.

--Alec Wilkinson, “The Cryonic Castle,” *The New Yorker* (January 19, 2004: 46)

Mary Shelley's famous 1818 gothic novel about the reanimation of dead body parts alludes several times to *The Arabian Nights* (c. 850) and deploys a narrative structure of nested stories opening into stories, like Chinese boxes, or Russian nested dolls suggesting pregnancy. The

story takes nine months to tell, starting with a letter from Captain Walton, dated St. Petersburg, December 11, 17--, and finishing with a last letter dated September 12th the following year. In this letter Walton describes the monster as looking like a “mummy” and reports that the monster complains that he is “abandoned, ” an “abortion.” In the book’s opening, Walton writes to his sister what Victor, near death, reports aboard Walton’s ice-bound ship. Within Victor’s narrative comes the monster’s tale, the heart of the book. This oral communication within oral communication within a written transcription belongs to the tradition of story telling associated with Scheherazade, who generated narratives to avoid beheading.

Kenneth Branagh’s 1994 film *Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein* invents a going-away party for Victor on the eve of his departure for university at Ingolstadt. Midway through the festivities, Alphonse stops the music and dancing to present his son with a somber gift from the dead Caroline Beaufort Frankenstein, Alphonse’s wife, Victor’s mother. This gift is a journal that begins, “This is the journal of Victor Frankenstein. ” Alphonse notes that the pages of the journal are blank, and adds, “To be filled with the deeds of a noble life.” This blank book from the absent mother exemplifies the way Branagh’s film makes explicit themes that remain submerged in Shelley’s novel, where the maternal signifier is not a journal but Caroline’s portrait, which travels from William to Justine, marking both for death.

In the novel, Caroline’s unspoken past haunts Victor in the form of a compulsion to bring the dead back to life in order to go down gloriously in history as a great man. Branagh brings forward the novel’s theme of the Enlightenment gone wrong in the way the film’s art direction contrasts the decorous architecture, furnishings, music and light of the Frankenstein household in Geneva with cramped, dark, crowded, noisy, disease-ridden Ingolstadt. The film emphasizes the historical context of the original novel by introducing Mary Shelley as a voice-over character at the outset of the movie, along with a moving textual panel invoking guillotine horrors during the French Revolution of 1789, when Enlightenment ideals eventuated in bodily dismemberments, especially decapitation.

In describing his grief for his mother’s death, in the novel Victor says, “I need not describe

the feeling of those whose dearest ties are rent by that most irreparable evil; the void that presents itself to the soul; and the despair that is exhibited of the countenance. It is so long before the mind can persuade itself that she, whom we saw every day, and whose very existence appeared a part of our own, can have departed for ever . . .” The phrase “the void that presents itself to the soul” suggests an inner emptiness as the psychic space kept within the survivor as a memorial to the dead, a kind of inner crypt, the space psychoanalysts Abraham and Torok have called the shell where the kernel of the secrets of the dead are stored as transgenerational family secrets haunting survivors who are unconsciously possessed by phantoms or specters. Note the emphasis Victor places on the permanence of death when describing his grief and the way he views death as the “most irreparable evil,” for this is an evil he feels determined to repair. In Branagh’s film, Victor rides on horseback to his mother’s funeral monument and declares, “No one need die.” This mad sense drives him to animate lifeless matter. In the University scenes in the film, it is clear that Victor is an outsider at Ingolstadt, where he is looked down upon as Swiss. His readings of ancient alchemical texts are regarded as outré and passé. Professor Krempe dismisses Paracelsus as an “arrogant and foolish Swiss” and Victor himself as “another Swiss.”

Victor however seems quite proud of his Swiss ancestry, introducing his story to Walton with the words, “I am by birth a Genevese; and my family is one of the most distinguished in the republic. My ancestors had been for many years counsellors and syndics; and my father had filled several public situations with honour and reputation.” This identifies the paternal side of Victor’s family.

The maternal side, Caroline Beaufort’s, presents another story. In “the decline of life,” Victor’s father Alphonse Frankenstein took a wife, the daughter of a merchant friend, Beaufort, fallen into poverty and removed to Lucerne, where he lived unknown in wretchedness with his only daughter and caretaker, who was reduced by their unfortunate circumstances to plaiting straw for a pittance scarcely sufficient to support life. Since Beaufort had formerly been distinguished by rank and magnificence, Shelley’s readers must imagine him as declassed and

humiliated; and indeed he seems to be in despair at death's door when Alphonse arrives to the rescue in time to see Caroline become a bereft orphan, her father having "died in her arms." After interring his disgraced and departed friend, Alphonse conducts the orphan to Geneva, where, two years later, she becomes his bride.

Victor recounts his happy infancy as the first child and "idol" of this happy pair who lacked for nothing except a daughter. In the 1818 version of the book, at the age of four years, Victor obtains a foster sister who is actually his first cousin, the daughter of Alphonse's sister who had married an Italian "gentleman," traveled to his country, and died. A few months after her death, Alphonse received a letter from his brother-in-law declaring an intention to marry again and asking to have his infant, Elizabeth, educated in Switzerland, and proposing that Alphonse consider her as his own. In other words, this Italian gentleman Lavenza, does not want to parent his own child.

In the 1831 revision of the novel, Victor's first cousin is actually a stranger though she continues to call him "cousin." In this version of Elizabeth's adoption, Caroline Beaufort Frankenstein fulfills her desire for a daughter when Victor is five by discovering among the poor on the shores of Lake Como a fair-haired, blue-eyed child appearing to be "of a different stock," "a distinct species" among the dark "vagrants" who comprise her peasant family. Caroline learns that this "heaven-sent" being with features of "celestial stamp" is a foster child, the daughter of a Milanese nobleman and a German woman who died giving birth to Elizabeth. This fair angel set in poverty, in other words, has a history that varies slightly Caroline's own story of displacement into obscurity and then redemption by a fortuitous sponsor who restores due and true class positioning, an abbreviated version of the family romance Freud analyzes as part of Otto Rank's *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero*. The idea of innate superiority in this revision runs counter to the progressivist critique of established privileges and the corrupting, demonizing effects of being a social outsider implicit in the monster's tale at the heart of the novel.

Caroline's will to restoration in her adoption of Elizabeth fuses with her symbolic haunting of Victor after she dies, for Caroline makes it clear that she intends Elizabeth to be Victor's

bride. At about the time Victor Frankenstein is to become a student at Ingolstadt, Elizabeth Lavenza catches scarlet fever. She is cared for in her illness by her foster mother, Caroline Frankenstein, who saves Elizabeth, but dying in the process, tells Elizabeth to “supply her place.” Not only does Victor know that his mother chose his wife, this wife-to-be gets explicitly identified in the novel as a mother substitute and family stand-in for the dead mother.

The substitutability of Elizabeth and Caroline, the living and the dead, expresses itself in a dream Victor has during the night he succeeds in revivifying dead body parts in order to give birth to the monster. In building up to this achievement, Victor reasons, “if I could bestow animation upon lifeless matter, I might in process of time . . . renew life where death had apparently devoted the body to corruption.” The drive to animate the dead can be read as Victor’s grieving response to his mother’s death, an uncanny desire to mix the living and the dead, to create the living dead, seeing life infuse into what was formerly lifeless. The project turns Victor into an emotional zombie, removed from the cycles of the seasons and the ongoing of natural life around him. At the moment Victor does see composite dead body parts convulse into life as a hideous monster, he is unable to endure the “aspect of the being [he] had created.” He paces his bedchamber, “unable to compose [his] mind to sleep.” Victor can neither look on what he has achieved nor fall asleep and face his dreams. When he finally does sleep in what he calls that fatal night of November, he is disturbed by a nightmare vision of Elizabeth, “in the bloom of health, walking the streets of Ingolstadt.” Delighted and surprised, Victor in his dream embraces her, but as he imprints a kiss on her lips, they become “livid with the hue of death.” Her features appear to change, and he dreams that he is holding the corpse of his dead mother in his arms. He reports, “a shroud enveloped her form, and I saw the *graveworms crawling in the folds of the flannel* [my italics]. I started from my sleep in horror; a cold dew covered my forehead, my teeth chattered, and every limb became convulsed.” This convulsion of the dreamer repeats the “convulsive motion” of the monster when the creature’s “dull yellow eye” first opened. The dreamer’s eyes now open to see by the “dim and yellow light of the moon” the monster staring down at him. Victor, now a lunatic, jumps away from the creature, whom he

perceives as a “demoniacal corpse.” Victor declares, “Oh! no mortal could support the horror of that countenance. A mummy again endued with animation could not be so hideous as that wretch.” Though the “mummy” can be contextualized as an allusion to the Egyptian antiquities Napoleon in his grandiose exportation of the French Revolution had excavated and paraded through Europe after his invasion of northern Africa in the early nineteenth century, the “mummy” here suggests as well the dead Caroline. The dream sequence and then the figure of the creature horrify Victor because the creature embodies the scientist’s ideal of giving life to the dead; as an uncanny form of symbolic maternal revivification, his ideal has proved deformed and monstrous. This dream coming immediately after Victor’s success in giving life to the monster expresses a psychic connection between Victor’s desire to give life, a form of maternal identification, and the legacy of his mother in his wish to become a great man by overcoming the limits of being one.

A morbid detail in this dream, of graveworms crawling in the folds of the flannel of the maternal corpse, recurs with compelling power in the scene in which the monster comes upon Justine sleeping with Caroline’s picture after the murder of William. Like Elizabeth Lavenza, Justine Moritz models herself on Caroline Beaufort Frankenstein. Elizabeth writes to Victor that Justine paid “the greatest attention to every gesture of my aunt. She thought her the model of all excellence, and endeavored to imitate her phraseology and manners, so that even now she often reminds me of her.” Justine had attended Caroline in her final illness, and contracted the same fever, which, according to her mother, caused the deaths of all the other Moritz children. So Justine’s closeness to and identification with Caroline carries guilt associated with the death of her siblings. This death leaves Justine an orphan of sorts because Madame Moritz neglects her only surviving child, but then frets herself to death and Justine actually becomes an orphan, in effect adopted into the Frankenstein household as a Caroline-replacement for Elizabeth, who is continually reminded of her aunt by Justine’s mien and expression. Similarly, we may add, Mary Shelley herself would have been reminded of her own dead mother in the person of her half-sister Fanny Imlay, who had witnessed and co-experienced Mary Wollstonecraft’s

abandonment by the love of her life, the American adventurer Gilbert Imlay, who failed to provide child support for their daughter (Todd, 1993: 133).

After the monster kills Justine and she is accused of William's murder, she actually confesses, suggesting that she unconsciously feels guilty for it. Victor, stunned into silence, fails to speak up to save her life, letting her be punished for a crime he knows the monster had committed and for which Victor himself feels responsible. The scene the creature recounts in confessing William's murder and the framing of Justine for the crime verbally echoes the scene of the monster leaning over the sleeping Victor as he awakes from his nightmare of the decomposing body of his mother. The monster killed William because the boy rejected an overture of friendship, just as Victor had rushed away in horror from the outstretched hand of his creation on the first night, a traumatic rejection repeated by the horrified response of the De Lacey family to the sight of the monster trying to make friends with their patriarch, a rejection the creature avenges by burning down their house. The monster recounts his exultation in seeing his first murder victim dead at his feet: "I exclaimed, 'I, too, can create desolation. . . .' As I fixed my eyes on the child, I saw something glittering on his breast. I took it; it was a portrait of a most lovely woman. In spite of my malignity, it softened and attracted me. For a few moments I gazed with delight on her dark eyes, fringed by deep lashes, and her lovely lips; but presently my rage returned: I remembered that I was for ever deprived of the delights such a beautiful creature could bestow; and that she whose resemblance I contemplated would, in regarding me, have changed that air of divine benignity to one expressive of disgust and affright. Can you wonder that such thoughts transported me with rage? While I was overcome by these feelings, I left the spot where I had committed the murder, and seeking a more secluded hiding-place, I entered a barn which had appeared to me to be empty. A woman was sleeping on some straw; she was young: not indeed so beautiful as her whose portrait I held; but of an agreeable aspect, and blooming in the loveliness of youth and health. Here, I thought, is one of those whose joy-imparting smiles are bestowed on all but me. And then I bent over her, and whispered, 'Awake, fairest, thy lover is near—he who would give his life but to obtain one look

of affection from thine eyes: my beloved awake!” This scene of a thwarted lover spying on his beloved as she sleeps gruesomely transforms the scene in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* where Oberon spies on Titania in love with a monster, only here the monster is the onlooker, a fused version of the horse’s head and the incubus who haunt the sleeping woman in Fuseli’s famous late-eighteenth century icon *The Nightmare*.

The monster reports how the sleeper stirred and a “thrill of terror” ran through him. “Should she indeed awake, and see me,” he wondered, “and curse me, and denounce the murderer? Thus would she assuredly act, if her darkened eyes opened and she beheld me. The thought was madness, it stirred the fiend within me—not I, but she shall suffer; the murder I have committed because I am for ever robbed of all that she could give me, she shall atone. The crime had its source in her: hers be the punishment! . . . I bent over her, and placed the portrait securely in one of the folds of her dress. She moved again, and I fled.” The detail of the “folds” is one of many connecting this scene to the November scene of the monster’s stirring from death to life and then causing Victor to flee when he awakes from his nightmare of the decomposing maternal body to see the monster leaning over his bed with lunar, yellow eyes. The monster plants the portrait of the dead mother in the folds of Justine’s dress, marking her for death.

The reader is invited to participate in a scene of looking on at a murder when the monster, by the light of the moon, watches Victor destroy the half-created creature intended to be the monster’s wife. Victor reports, “The remains of the half-finished creature, whom I had destroyed, lay scattered on the floor, and I almost felt as I had mangled the living flesh of a human being.” When the monster sees his bride torn to pieces, he enters the scene to threaten the killer with the words, “I shall be with you on your wedding night.” Fearing the monster’s revenge for the dead female creature, Victor is haunted by these words, “*I will be with you on your wedding night,*” which appear in italics in the text of the novel as they replay in Victor’s mind.

In her essay, “My Monster/ Myself,” Barbara Johnson (1982) has pointed out that this is one of only two italicized passages in the book. The other italicized words appear in Mary Shelley’s

1831 author's Introduction to the text, where she recounts the now famous genesis of the book in dream serving her participation in an authorship contest to think up a horror story. We read, "On the morrow I announced that I had *thought of a story*. It began with the words, "*It was on a dreary night of November*, making only a transcript of the grim terrors of my waking dream"—her dream, that is, of the "pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together," then rushing away to sleep "in belief that the silence of the grave would quench for ever the transient existence of the hideous corpse which he had looked upon as the cradle of life." "He sleeps," she reports in the present tense as if reliving the dream, "but he is awakened; he opens his eyes; behold the horrid thing stands at his bedside, opening his curtains, and looking on him with yellow, watery, but speculative eyes. I opened mine in terror."

This scene of genesis, in the italics in its report as well as in its configuration of horror during sleep, connects not only to Victor's November nightmare but to the scene of Elizabeth's murder on her wedding night. Victor exclaims in reporting the scene of his discovery of his bride's corpse, "Great God! Why did I not then expire! Why am I here to relate the destruction of the best hope and the purest creature of earth. She was there, lifeless and inanimate, thrown across the bed, her head hanging down, and her pale and distorted features half covered by her hair. Every where I turn I see the same figure--her bloodless arms and relaxed form flung by the murderer on its bridal bier."

More than one reader of *Frankenstein* has recognized Henri Fuseli's 1781 *The Nightmare* as an apposite association to this scene of nighttime horror. In his annotated version of the novel Leonard Wolf notes that this "famous painting inspired the description of Elizabeth's dead body flung across her bridal bed just after her murder by the creature (in Chapter 23 of *Frankenstein*). This painting is also known as "The Incubus"—an incubus being a male demon or spirit that visits sleeping females in the night, usually for sexual purposes." "As if this weren't enough," says Wolf, Mary Shelley's mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, had a relationship (not quite a sexual affair, apparently, to Wollstonecraft's disappointment) with Fuseli, a fact which Mary Shelley knew." Wolf notes that Mary Wollstonecraft had fallen in love with Fuseli, a fixation which

lasted nearly four years and that “[I]t may be relevant to the skein of relationships that the egotistic Fuseli, like Frankenstein, was born in Switzerland” (Wolf, 1977).

By adding to Leonard Wolf Barbara Johnson’s observation of the italicized connection between Elizabeth’s dead body on her bridal bed and the scene Mary Shelley recounts of the genesis of the book, we may conclude that Fuseli’s *The Nightmare* can be regarded as a primal scene of the novel, iterated not only on the night of monstrous birth, but also in the scene of the monster’s leaning over Justine’s sleeping body, and indeed in the final view Captain Walton has of the monster leaning over his creator in Victor’s death scene aboard ship in the frozen arctic, a setting that conveys the lack of affection exuded by Victor’s quest, which is ultimately suicidal.

Ellen Moers (1977) has read this book as working out Mary Shelley’s response to fears of pregnancy rooted in the death of her mother from a childbirth fever following Mary’s birth. The unconscious logic of the book, suggests Moers, is, *Having lost my mother to a childbed fever at the time of my birth, if I myself give birth, I will be pursued by my own childhood, monstrous wishes for revenge for that abandonment.*

I am arguing that Frankenstein as a creator is motivated by his mother's legacy, which involves not only reviving her symbolically from the dead but working out her secret disgrace—her declension in class, her intimacy with her father as a widower. This disgrace, presumably transmitted cryptically to her son, suggests an intergenerational, incestuous primal scene reminiscent of Fuseli’s *Nightmare*. In this image, the night mother is represented in the form of the head of a mare on which the incubus rides. Ernest Jones (1931) thought this picture condensed a fantasy of incest—the incubus as parent figure visiting the child’s bed at night, along with horror associated with the incestuous visitation. It is worth observing that Mary Shelley’s *Mathilda*, a novella written in 1820 but suppressed from publication until 1959, treats father-daughter incest in a story in which a father compensates for his dead wife by falling in love with his daughter. The image of the spectral mother and the fantasy of parent-child incest was evidently a thematic preoccupation for the teen-aged Shelley.

Moreover, her father William Godwin, who claimed his family name derived from the Norse

God Odin, was chronically short of money and expected his daughter Mary to keep him in cash from whatever resources her aristocratic husband Percy Shelley could extract from moneylenders. This drama took place in the midst of Mary Shelley's grief for the suicide of her half-sister Fanny Imlay, the daughter of the depressive Mary Wollstonecraft and the abandoning father Gilbert Imlay, a maternal trauma that found expression through the character of Justine in *Frankenstein*.

Kenneth Branagh's film increases the violence of the bridal death scene and dissolves the distancing a reader's recognition of Fuseli's famous icon might provide by having De Niro crash through the roof of the bridal chamber and rip Elizabeth's heart from her body, possibly in allusion to the 1633 revenge drama *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, a tale of brother-sister incest, by John Ford, in which Giovanni avenges his beloved sister's betrothal to a rival by stabbing her to death and bringing her heart impaled upon his dagger to what was supposed to be her wedding banquet. Piling on the Jacobean-like scenario of the monster offering Victor the spectacle of Elizabeth's heart still beating in her murderer's hand perhaps points to the film's precursors in Francis Ford Coppola's violent 1971 *Godfather* film saga as well as to Branagh's own background and training as an Shakespearean actor. The appalling and borderline funny bridal murder scene goes over the top of the long theatrical and cinematic tradition associated with *Frankenstein*.

Heidi Kaye points out that Kenneth Branagh's revising of Mary Shelley's novel in his film version brings forward 1970s and 1980s feminist themes, emphasizing the history of eighteenth-century childbirth techniques, giving Shelley herself a voice in the film by having parts of her 1831 introduction to the book spoken in voice over at the film's outset, and building up the part of Elizabeth Lavenza by casting the box office draw Helena Bonham-Carter in the role of Elizabeth and making her Victor's peer and potential collaborator in having her travel to Ingostadt to tend him in his postpartum depression.

On the other hand, notes Kaye, this film is about male bonding. Branagh was brought aboard the film project as director when Francis Ford Coppola of *Godfather* fame declined the

job. Branagh, in the early stages of his film career, was building alliances with powerful male players in the financial establishment of the Hollywood dream factory. Two years before, in 1992, Coppola had made *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, a postmodern treatment of Stoker's 1897 novel. The novelist's name appears in Coppola's film title because the title *Dracula per se* was previously copyrighted. Similarly, says Kaye, Branagh's use of the author's name in his title *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* serves to avoid copyright disputes with earlier film treatments of the novel. It also aligns Branagh's film with Coppola's of the parallel title. It is less Shelley among the feminists that preoccupies Branagh, argues Kaye, than his own role *vis-à-vis* the producer Francis Ford Coppola and the box office star Robert De Niro, cast in the role of the monster.

Kaye points out how Branagh's incorporation of Mary Shelley's female authority and his enlargement from the novel of the role of not only Elizabeth but also of Justine is countermanded in the film by the building up of male-to-male alliances. Whereas Alphonse is a lawyer in the original novel, the screenplay for Branagh's film makes him a doctor, thus emphasizing male genealogy in Victor's choice of profession. The film also builds up Victor's relationship with Professor Waldman at Ingostadt, showing Waldman as a disgraced, shadowy, suspect professor already having tried himself to bring the dead back to life. When De Niro in the role of a hatchet-faced, peg-legged man stabs and kills Dr. Waldman during an attempted inoculation against cholera, Victor removes Waldman's brain and puts it into the skull of the monster. Thus the monster is a mental and physical collaboration between professor and student. The birthing of the monster from a symbolic, exteriorized womb in the form of a copper cauldron penetrated by electrical eels looking like gigantic sperm descending from billowing testicular shapes suspended above the cauldron culminates in a slimy wrestling match between Branagh as Victor and De Niro as the monster, recalling the male-to-male eroticized, semi-nude confrontation between the male protagonists in Ken Russell's 1969 film *Women in Love*, based on the D. H. Lawrence novel. De Niro as peg-legged ruffian, transformed by the insertion of Waldman's brain and the grafting on of various body parts, becomes an outsized authority figure who

confronts Branagh's Victor at the end of an icy tunnel suggesting a birth canal the monster forces his creator to pass through on the way to a fireside chat, wherein Victor receives a stern lecture on the duties of a parent. In a film that itself seems in a grand manner to be very alive, the male-to-male birth scenes connect Branagh to a lineage of male filmmakers, including Fritz Lang (the scene of the animation of the robot in 1926-7's *Metropolis*) and James Whale, director of the famous 1931 *Frankenstein* film starring Boris Karloff as the monster. Though his *Frankenstein* film was a box office failure, thanks to Branagh-Victor's depressive demeanor, the outrageousness of the denouement, and the ridicule reviewers heaped on Branagh's oiled muscles in his shirtless scene and the credit he gave to his personal trainer, Branagh was hoping to join a line of male box office heavy hitters and he was playing opposite Robert De Niro.

Branagh alludes to the image of male on male creativity represented in Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel painting of God extending his finger to animate Adam in the scene where Victor takes William, Justine, and Elizabeth to a picnic when a thunderstorm is about to start. Victor pulls out a lightning rod suggesting Benjamin Franklin with his kite and key among the stormy elements, transmitting electricity. As the lightning rod attracts lightning from the sky, Victor and his entourage join hands in a circle. Afterward, in delighted surprise and awe at Victor's scientific prowess, they spark electricity between their fingers. This lightning rod scene prefigures the stormy night Victor uses electricity to animate his amniotic golem.

In place of Caroline's picture in Mary Shelley's novel, *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* has Branagh/Victor's picture in the locket that travels between William and Justine. Justine is in love with Victor in Branagh's film, an addition to the novel. Trevyn McDowell, a blond Justine (played as a child by the blond Christine Cuttall) contrasts visually with the dark-haired Helena Bonham-Carter in the role of Elizabeth. During the *Frankenstein* film project, Branagh transferred his erotic affections from the blond Emma Thompson, then his wife, to the dark-haired Bonham-Carter. Emma Thompson around this time made the movie *Junior* with Arnold Schwarzenegger, who plays a man giving birth with Thompson's character as his scientific assistant. So if this married couple were going to give birth, one might conclude, it would seem

to be to the form of male birth fantasy. In Branagh's film the blond Justine and the dark-haired Elizabeth are joined together in a single figure when Victor cuts off the heads and hands of the two women in order to put Elizabeth's head on Justine's body and Elizabeth's hands on Justine's arms, a radical alteration of the climax to Shelley's novel. In this grotesque way, Branagh-Victor seems to have both women at once, thus suggesting in the psychology of the making of the film the emotional monstrosity of Victor in Shelley's original novel. Kaye thinks the decapitating of the women represents masculine backlash against the feminist themes made manifest by the bringing forward of Mary Shelley's authority and the building up of the women's roles in the story. These decapitations also recall the horse's head in Fuseli's *Nightmare*, and produce an effect of horror comparable to the decapitated horsehead placed in the bed in Coppola's 1971 *The Godfather*. We can discern here a masculine defense taking the form of identification with powerful father figures against the threat of castration implied by a persistent maternal imago.

Works Cited

- Abraham, Nicolas and Torok, Maria (1987). *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Nicholas T. Rand (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press) 1994.
- Branagh, Kenneth. *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein: The Classic Tale of Terror Reborn on Film* (New York: Newmarket Pictorial Moviebook) 1994.
- Branagh, Kenneth, dir. *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* (Columbia Tri Star Pictures Videocassette: 1994).
- Ford, John. *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* (1633).
- Freud, Sigmund ([1908] 1909). "Family Romances," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed., trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1959), IX: 235-241.
- Jones, Ernest (1931). *On the Nightmare* (New York: Liveright) 1951.

- Johnson, Barbara, "My Monster/My Self," *Diacritics* 12 (1982): 2-10.
- Kaye, Heidi, "Feminist Sympathies Versus Masculine Backlash: Kenneth Branagh's *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*," *Pulping Fictions: Consumer Culture Across the Literature/Media Divide* (London: Pluto) 1996.
- Moers, Ellen, *Literary Women* (Garden City, New York: Anchor), 1977.
- Rank, Otto (1914). *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero*, trans. F. Robbins and Smith Ely Jelliffe, ed. Philip Freund (New York: Vintage) 1932, 1959.
- Rieger, James, ed. *Frankenstein or, The Modern Prometheus, 1818 Text* (Chicago and London University of Chicago Press) 1974, 1982.
- Shelley, Mary (1818, 1831), *Frankenstein* (New York: Dell) 1965.
- Shelley, Mary (1820). "Mathilda," *The Mary Shelley Reader*, Ed. Betty T. Bennett and Charles E. Robinson (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press) 1990.
- Tomory, Peter. *The Life and Art of Henry Fuseli* (New York and Washington: Praeger) 1972.
- Thomas, Ronald R. "Specters of the Novel: *Dracula* and the Cinematic Afterlife of the Victorian Novel," *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 20 (2000): 77-102.
- Todd, Janet. *Gender, Art and Death* (New York: Continuum) 1993.
- Wilkinson, Alec, "The Cryonic Castle," *The New Yorker* (January 19, 2004).
- Wolf, Leonard. *The Annotated Frankenstein* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter) 1977.
- Woolf, Virginia (1928). *A Room of One's Own* (New York: Harcourt Brace & World) 1929.